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INFO RUEHTH/AMEMBASSY ATHENS 9510
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 5473
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RUEHBS/AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS 7153
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E.O. 12958: N/A
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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT
THURSDAY, MARCH 5, 2009

In Today's Papers

Ankara's Messages for Secretary Clinton

Mainstream Sabah reports that "US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton will have meetings with President Gul, PM Erdogan and FM Babacan during his visit to Turkey on March 7." At a countdown meeting at the MFA, Minister Babacan and his team decided to give the message that they were ready to cooperate and also emphasize Turkish sensitivity regarding the PKK issue and Armenian Genocide claims. US troop withdrawal in Iraq, transfer of troops to Afghanistan and parliamentary permission needed to take the military equipment out of Iraq through Turkey are some of the issues to be discussed at the meeting.

In a related story, mainstream Vatan reports that on his way to Brussels, FM Babacan talked to the press at the airport and said "no official request came from the US to use Turkish ports or bases in order to withdraw its troops from Iraq. If a request comes from the States, Turkey's approach to the issue would be positive."

Ambassador Jeffrey 'Observes' Mersin Port for US Iraq Exit

Mainstream Aksam reports US Ambassador James Jeffrey made Wednesday some "observations" at the port of Mersin on the Turkish Mediterranean with regard to the withdrawal of US troops and weapons from Iraq. "We will be pulling out of Iraq 150,000 troops and some equipment over the next 19 months. The existing agreements between Turkey and the US allow for such an operation, but no final decisions on the Iraq withdrawal have been made yet yet," emphasized Jeffrey.

Editorial Commentary on US Troop and Weapons Withdrawal from Iraq

Ismail Kucukkaya wrote in mainstream Aksam: "The US wants to withdraw from Iraq via Turkey due to some strategic concerns as well as cost calculations. Ankara has a positive approach to the idea, but it does not want to declare its position before receiving an official request. The route that the US troops will follow during withdrawal and other details about the withdrawal will top the agenda of Secretary Clinton's visit to Ankara. For this reason, the US is giving special attention to Incirlik/Adana and Tasucu/Mersin

Port. That was why Ambassador Jeffrey has visited Mersin twice since his arrival to Ankara. Although the US's decision on the troop withdrawal is welcomed in Ankara, there are serious concerns about the weapons left behind by the US army. High levels of diplomacy and security have concern over potential 'unclaimed weapons syndrome.' Given the huge number of missing weapons, as many as 190.000, Ankara does not want any possibility of weapons left behind that could fall into the hands of PKK. This is going to be one of the topics raised by Ankara during Secretary Hillary Clinton's visit."

Deputy Chief of General Staff General Igsiz in Baghdad
Mainstreams Hurriyet, Vatan and Sabah report that TGS Deputy Chief General Hasan Igsiz went to Baghdad yesterday upon the invitation of Iraqi Defense Minister Abdulkadir Jassim. During the meeting, military issues related to both countries were discussed and the importance of ongoing cooperation was emphasized. TGS announced the visit in a written statement and also said that General Igsiz had a meeting with the MNF commander about Turkey-US military cooperation.

ICC Issues Warrant for Sudanese Leader Bashir
The International Criminal Court's decision to issue an arrest warrant for Sudanese President Omar Al-Bashir for war crimes and crimes against humanity is receiving large media attention today. Liberal Radikal headlines, "ICC's Arrest Warrant for Bashir." Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet reports, "the warrant is the first against a sitting head of state by the International Criminal Court." Mainstream Milliyet reports, "Turkey was one of the countries refusing to recognize the jurisdiction of the ICC," and

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warns "Ankara might seriously harm its image by preserving close ties with Bashir." Mainstream Hurriyet and other papers note, "while the court charged Bashir with war crimes, it stopped short of charging him with genocide due to insufficient evidence." Cumhuriyet adds, "there is no international police force to enforce the indictment, suspects can be arrested only in the states aside in the agreement establishing the ICC. It seems impossible for the Sudanese government to enforce the decision." Foreign Minister Babacan said on the issue, "We hope that this will not worsen the situation in the region."

Editorial Commentary on ICC Arrest Warrant for Sudan's al-Bashir

Erdal Safak wrote in mainstream Sabah: "The arrest warrant for El Beshir will only worsen the situation in Darfur. The court decision is not even fully endorsed by the UN Security Council. Moreover, the African Union and the Arab League remain opposed to the decision. All of this only indicates some bad news for the future as the problem will likely deepen."

Ibrahim Karagul wrote in Islamist oriented Yeni Safak: "Turkey does not recognize the Hague court, therefore, the arrest warrant will not have a binding effect on Turkey. And the same goes to the United States as well. There is certainly a tragedy in Darfur but this is not the way to resolve it."

TV News (CNN Turk)

Domestic News

- The Dutch Safety Authority says a "faulty altimeter" shut down the engine of the Turkish Airlines flight that crashed near Amsterdam airport last week. Turkish aviation experts rejected yesterday the "explanation," saying the crash was caused by wake turbulence made by a Boeing-757 which landed minutes before the Turkish airliner.

- The ruling AKP deputy chairman Bulent Gedikli says IMF was a "shortsighted" institution, adding the IMF proposals on the economic crisis would "harm" Turkey.

- Former UNDP head Kemal Dervis becomes a member of the Sabanci University's International Advisory Board.

- Four demonstrators, including a student and two teachers, are

given 11 months and 20 days prison sentences for "insulting" PM Erdogan by shouting "Light-Bulb Tayyip" at a protest demonstration in the city of Bursa.

International News

- German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Kurdish leader Massoud Barzani "welcome" the improvements between Turkey and northern Iraq at their meeting in Berlin.
- Israeli fighter jets bombed yesterday the northern Gaza Strip.
- The director of the FBI arrives in Pakistan to help investigate last year's Mumbai attacks.
- BP Turkey is "fined" 474 million lira by the Turkish Finance Ministry for irregularities in tax-free fuel oil sale at the Bulgarian and Greek borders.

JEFFREY